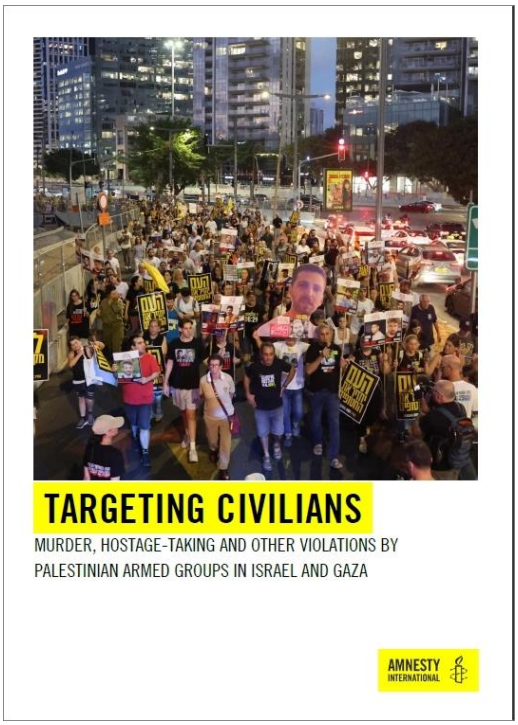
TARGETING CIVILIANS
MURDER, HOSTAGE-TAKING AND OTHER VIOLATIONS BY PALESTINIAN ARMED GROUPS IN ISRAEL AND GAZA
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Report

More than two years after the Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on 7 October 2023 and in the wake of the release of all those seized alive on that day, accounts of the actions of Palestinian armed groups during the attacks and their subsequent treatment of those held in captivity in Gaza are still emerging. Survivors of the attacks, including those released from captivity, as well as the families of victims, continue to shed light on their own experiences, while seeking justice and redress. Amnesty International hopes that the findings of its investigation into the attacks and the treatment of those held in captivity, as well as its legal determination of the crimes committed, can support their efforts and contribute to the establishment of the truth.

The attacks of 7 October 2023 and the subsequent holding of individuals in captivity were part of a non-international armed conflict between Palestinian armed groups and Israel. They took place against the backdrop of Israel's prolonged occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and the widespread human rights violations perpetrated by Israeli forces against Palestinians, including the imposition of a system of apartheid on Palestinians and the long-standing illegal blockade of Gaza since 2007.

In the wake of the 7 October 2023 attacks, Israel embarked on a military offensive on Gaza unprecedented in magnitude, scale and duration, and intensified its illegal blockade on this part of the OPT. In December 2024, Amnesty International concluded that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza. Its forces carried out acts prohibited under the Genocide Convention, with the specific intent to physically destroy Palestinians in Gaza. These acts included killings, causing serious bodily or mental harm and deliberately inflicting on Palestinians in Gaza conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction.

Hamas has claimed that its forces were not involved in the targeted killing, abduction or mistreatment of civilians during the 7 October 2023 attacks, that many civilians were killed by Israeli fire and that it did not plan to take civilians hostage. However, based on extensive video, testimonial and other evidence, Amnesty International has concluded that, while some civilians were indeed killed by Israeli forces, the vast majority of those who died were killed by Palestinian fighters. It considers that all those taken to Gaza were unlawfully detained as hostages and that all were subjected to psychological abuse. It has documented evidence that some of those captured on 7 October 2023 – both soldiers and civilians – were subjected to physical and sexual violence, either in Israel or in Gaza. It could not reach conclusions on the scope or scale of the sexual violence.

Amnesty International has found sufficient basis to conclude that many of these violations were carried out by members of Palestinian armed groups and constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder and torture. To date, no one has been brought to justice for them.

Around 1,200 people were killed during the attacks of 7 October 2023. They included more than 800 civilians, among them at least 36 children, and around 300 Israeli soldiers. The victims were primarily Jewish Israelis, but also included Bedouin

citizens of Israel, and scores of foreign national migrant workers, students and asylum seekers. More than 4,000 people were injured, and hundreds of homes and civilian structures were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable.
Another 251 people – mostly civilians – were forcibly taken to Gaza on 7 October 2023. The majority of these 251 people were seized alive and held in captivity, but, in 36 cases, reportedly, they were already dead when captured. They were held for weeks, months or, in some cases, over two years.
Tens of thousands of residents from the attacked areas, as well as other parts of southern Israel, were displaced from their homes on 7 October 2023. Thousands remain displaced, having lost their loved ones and their homes, and face ongoing trauma.

Amnesty International

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